

Descended from Refugees

Rosemary Dunn Moeller

For years, I've been a descendant of immigrants.
No more. I'm reassigning my ancestors to refugee status,
by me. No different than desperate
displaced persons
from Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, Guatemala.
As if leaving the Pale of Settlement was an easy choice,
for Benderskis and Dunkses,
or for Holmes' starved off farms on stone-necklaced Irish
hills.
Houles, indentured servants, sold from Normandy to
Quebec farms.
I'm the descendant of refugees,
three generations or five. It doesn't matter.
I need to write it, say it, remind myself how I got here,
from economic, political, religious oppression,
to cultural, religious, economic repression.
And I am the beneficiary of survivors,
witnesses to prejudice, bigotry,
hated here and there, nobility of the have-nots.
I'm proud to descend from refugees, the indentured,
used to keep wages low, schools separate, steal land from
others.
Used, abused, sheltered in communities, given lands
and jobs to subserve powers so others would starve, homeless.
We're no nation of immigrants, but one
of slaves and indigenous survivors of genocide,
refugees and opportunists, dreamers and makers of nightmares,
using resources, giving back, paid and paying.
We, carpenters of bigger tables, more chairs
and new roofs, all need to all survive.

Strolling Downhill with Sisyphus

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I interviewed Sisyphus, three-thousand-year old King of Corinth, eternal slave to gods and their unforgiving rage, like Sisyphus had as king. Nasty, in an eternal way that looks like fate, but's just politics.

I started at the base with him, my questions on i-pad, and his boulder, to learn what wisdom he'd share. Sisyphus was speechless. His task was everything. Half-way up he stopped, leaned royally against rock, and interviewed me, I think. "Do you notice we're turning? The smoothness of the trail? Have you been watching me?"

I looked back down the zig-zag across and up the mountain we'd traveled, the path wide and smooth. "I like to push towards the right, widening and smoothing the trail, not grooving and gouging into the mountain, keeping it balanced, my creation after all. You haven't asked the right questions."

He turned, pushing the boulder but never sweating, uphill, ignoring my interruptions. I imagined a descriptive interview maybe being accepted. I'd failed to prepare enough for a myth. Finally, the summit, less than a breath, down rolled the boulder and I cried for Sisyphus, knowing what a murdering, vicious, brute he was as a mortal; but, an eternal example of wasted time.

He kicked a clod off the peak down the other side, took my hand.

"Now we talk. I'm patron of slaves and servants,
assembly-line

knick-knack and souvenir makers of the useless,
pre-broken

garbage. Low-wage, low-educated, unempowered,
workers.

Feeling sorry? Write about your sense of unfairness. A waste.

Now we walk." On this side of his mountain, I saw a delta of trails.

"Look. I don't sleep. I've taken this slope at every time of day,

every season of the year, every climate mirrored on earth.

Once

I walked one step a day. Once ran straight down for fun. It's glorious, this mountain of mine, and my eternal duty is also to stroll

as I please, however twisted the trails around cedars and olive groves,

with all the flowers and birds, effortless, downhill, easy as water.

My punishment is to appreciate what others won't, to be unable to convince the powers of their poverty."